

# Medical risks or complex narratives?

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## Valorisation

Valorisation is, officially, the third task of Dutch universities, after education and research. It refers to the

process of creating value from knowledge, by making knowledge suitable and/or available for social use and by making knowledge suitable for translation into competitive products, services, processes, and new commercial activities. (adapted definition based on the National Valorisation Committee, 2011:8)

In this chapter, I briefly explain the societal relevance of this study and the possible impact on public debates.

The foundation of this study, the topic of research, and the target population already have important social relevance. As is well known, Colombia has experienced armed conflict for more than fifty years, which has involved illegal groups (i.e., guerrilla and paramilitaries) and the Colombian government and its army, negatively impacting many non-combatant civilians. The armed conflict includes the recruitment of minors, sexual violence, the deployment of anti-personnel mines, extreme violence, kidnappings, and massacres of entire villages (Alzate, 2008; IDMC, 2015); it has created an estimated 7.7 million long-term internally displaced persons (IDPs) since 1985. This displacement predominantly involves movement from rural areas to large urban cities, with the capital Bogotá being the primary destination of displaced individuals (IDMC, 2019; Rolon Salazar, 2018). IDPs face significant difficulties when arriving in large cities. They experience poverty and familial breakdowns and have minimal access to social and healthcare services (Hynes et al., 2016). Upon arriving at their destination, IDPs continue to fear cells of armed groups hidden in neighbourhoods, causing intra-urban displacement (Alzate, 2007; Meertens, 2010; Wirtz et al., 2014).

The topic dealt with in this research is adolescent pregnancy (AP) among internally displaced persons (IDPs). It is considered a major concern due to the higher incidence of AP among this population compared to adolescents who are not IDPs (Ruiz, 2013; Morón-Duarte, Latorre, & Tovar, 2014; Daniels, 2015), despite the policies aimed to prevent it. This study employed an anthropological approach to explore the life stories of internally displaced adolescent mothers. The study's primary social relevance because the findings provide

important information and insights to Colombian policy makers to attune their policies better to the Internally displaced adolescent mothers' experiences and needs.

Moreover, the development of this study is an example of research that has a social impact because involves internally displaced adolescent mothers who were displaced by different armed groups and came from different regions of Colombia. It represents a way to work with persons who have experienced armed conflict and displacement in a country that is still experiencing armed conflict in rural areas. Through this research they could share bonding time and doing so, they found communalities in their experiences, such as motherhood or the displacement itself.

First, I will present an overview of the different activities that took place during the study to disseminate the findings and valorise the insights of this research. Then, future directions for further valorisation are described.

## **1. VALORISING WHILE DOING**

The valorisation of this study was organised in parallel with the research due to the methodology employed, which permits the co-production of activities (i.e., in-depth interviews and workshops). This enabled mutual engagement between the researcher and participants. Additionally, topics related to this research are considered extremely relevant to our country, namely armed conflict, internal displacement, and health conditions among IDPs, specifically adolescent pregnancy.

Beginning this research in the neighbourhood had a social impact in the sense that the community was sensitised to new strategies that internally displaced persons consider valuable. Although there was another project going on in the community at the same time as this study (Vidas Móviles), the methodology used in this research went beyond health-promotion lectures and focused on participants' viewpoints, their experiences, and their knowledge. For example, we conducted in-depth interviews, some of them conducted in the participants' homes, and explored the women's life stories. Participants were free to openly express their personal and sensitive experiences they had living in rural areas during their childhood. Participants expressed several times that these activities were opportunities to be open and share their lives with someone who wanted to listen to them and was a great benefit. They expressed that otherwise, they would not have the opportunity to express their experiences to someone who is neutral and interested. They valued being listened to more than my visits as a physician when I worked with them on a previous project. They stated these activities were an opportunity to reflect on and rebuild their lives, as well as find new opportunities for them and their children.

We also conducted workshops with internally displaced adolescent mothers. During the first six workshops, participants engaged in different activities, such as role-playing, making

clay crafts, painting, or singing, as a way to discuss and elaborate on various topics, such as motherhood or displacement. These workshops were also opportunities for the mothers to be engaged with other mothers who were considered ‘enemies’ because they were displaced by rival armed groups. They were able to build relationships and find common experiences that helped them to forgive and overcome difficulties, for example, obtaining information from other mothers on how to enrol their children in school.

The final two workshops’ agendas included presenting the results and analysis. These were a clear opportunity to reflect on their own lives and for the researcher to request their opinions and suggestions regarding the different topics covered in the study. Participants considered these activities a tool that could help them in the process of dealing with their past and help them during resettlement. This is an example of how research can play a role in the peace process and how the development of and participation in this type of study can impact women’s lives.

In a similar way, the work with professionals was an opportunity for them to be open and share their experiences freely, although it could compromise their image or job. They found it valuable and stated this kind of activity is a way to deal with stress and emotional tiredness caused by their work. This research opened the door for professionals to reflect on how they are performing their work. The researcher listening to and being interested in their experiences was considered valuable. Organisations could take this into account and provide these kinds of activities as a tool to improve the professionals’ work performance and wellbeing.

*Photographs of a selection of the valorisation activities with Internally displaced adolescent mothers during this study:*

- *Clay crafts created during a workshop on displacement.*



- *Socialisation of ideas regarding motherhood in the workshops.*



- *Sharing with Internally displaced adolescent mothers and their children.*



Over the past three years, the findings of this study were disseminated for an academic and scientific audience. Presentations and discussions of the different parts of this study took place during several conferences, seminars, and workshops in Bogota, Colombia, and in other countries (i.e., China, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the Netherlands). I felt that my presentation of this study should be interesting to the different academic audiences, and the academic meetings provided an opportunity to elaborate on this topic, as well as find commonalities and differences with other settings. To enable disseminating the study's results and conducting follow-up processes (see the next section) among diverse, somewhat literate Spanish-speaking audiences, we developed a website on which the information is presented, along with additional information about the study communicated via blogs, brief videos, and other formats: [www.yazmincadenacamargo.co](http://www.yazmincadenacamargo.co).

## **2. CONTINUING THE VALORISATION PROCESS**

To continue the valorisation process, different kinds of activities addressing various audiences are under development.

## Policymakers and professionals

One of the next steps following this research will focus on engaging with policy bodies, professional organisations, and IDP organisations, such as Colombia’s First Lady (i.e., office of the President), the Ministry of Health, and the People’s Defense, who work with IDPs and have engaged in the peace process. This research provides interesting and valuable insights regarding why some of the policies have not met the government’s expectations (i.e., decreasing the incidence of AP among IDPs) and provides new insight into why it is relevant to include the perspectives of adolescent mothers in the process of building effective policies. We are currently organising a series of meetings that will take place in 2020, where these bodies can be made aware of the outcomes of this research and co-develop new research agendas that address internally displaced adolescent mothers and include them and their perspectives in the policymaking process.

## Guiding a new generation of academics

First, as a professor of medicine at Javeriana University, I will share the knowledge and experiences obtained during this research through several courses and workshops presented to medical students and graduate students. Insights will be used as input for educational and training activities to understand the importance of the emic perspective. As health professionals, they will understand the importance of not only addressing the biomedical and epidemiological perspective but also understanding the individual as a person rather than as a disease or ‘problem’, as well as and their contexts (e.g., their histories, the armed conflict, life in rural areas). This will be crucial for developing their professionalism and the effectiveness of medicine and other health professions. Additionally, I have contacted colleagues from other universities to arrange meetings and share experiences with these topics, build a larger network, sensitise colleagues to these topics in other institutions, and collaborate with them.

## IDP communities

One of Javeriana University’s aims is to offer social support to vulnerable populations, and we plan to continue working with IDP communities by implementing the aforementioned activities and workshops as a follow-up due to the value internally displaced adolescent mothers found in them. For example, despite the difficulties IDPs face as a mobile population (i.e., they typically continuing changing their place of residence), I still have contact with some of them to build a network that can provide guidance to other displaced individuals when they arrive in Bogota.